I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional urban focus of land use planning and land use controls has broadened to include rural areas within recent decades. The 1950’s and 1960’s saw a growing population with increased mobility, rising standards of living, and changing consumer preferences. These factors resulted in population movement from relatively high-density central cities to relatively low-density suburbs and beyond. These same factors, along with increased leisure time and earlier retirement, also led more people to purchase recreational property, particularly waterfront lands. Problems that all too often characterized this sprawled development, such as failing septic tanks and damage to houses built upon flood plains, brought about a growing interest in land use planning and land use controls in rural areas. In addition to these problems, the 1970’s have seen a growing public awareness of the limited and fixed nature of our natural resource base. Among the important resource issues on the public agenda are protection of wetlands and preservation of essential agricultural lands.

Ideally, these issues are addressed on a local level within the context of a comprehensive local or regional land use plan. These plans should be based upon inventory and analysis of population factors, economic activities, and the natural resource base including soils information. A typical plan may include the following land use policies: a pattern of cohesive urban growth; appropriate location of various uses on suitable soils; preservation of productive agricultural lands; and protection of wetlands, flood plains, and other important natural resource areas. Land use controls that use soils information, such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, sanitary codes, and certain special purpose regulations, can be important tools to achieve these objectives.

This chapter discusses the role that detailed soils information can play in preparing and administering land use control measures. Four regulatory programs using soils information are described: (i) state and local control of unsewered subdivisions and septic tank installation; (ii) zoning designed to protect agricultural lands; (iii) wetland regulations; and (iv) floodplain zoning. The physical and/or conceptual basis for using soils information is